



SUMMER | Plants

Good Leaf, Bad Leaf: Keeping our Plants Healthy

Summary:

The physical appearance of our plants is one of the best and most simple indicators of plant health. Through careful observation of a plant's leaves, we can often tell if the plant is getting enough water, if it is too hot or cold, or if it is drowning. In this lesson, your tiny gardener will have the opportunity to explore the garden and determine which plants are healthy or not and to sharpen their fine motor and observational skills.

Before Visiting the Garden:

Gather: A magnifying glass

Explore: *Vase with Dead Leaves* by Vincent Van Gogh: Do you think these are healthy leaves? What color and shape are they?

Read: *A Leaf Can Be* by Laura Purdie Salas

In the Garden:

Tiny gardeners are the perfect height for assessing leaf health! Unlike taller adults, they can see eye to eye with their plants. Tiny gardeners are also well suited to sorting, identifying things alike and different. These skills will come in handy as we explore the garden and check on plant health.

- Start by walking through the garden. Use the magnifying glass. If your gardener is old enough to hold and focus through a lens, look more closely at the leaves.
- You may notice that one area of your garden has a higher concentration of healthy plants than another. Can you problem solve why that might be?

Questions to Explore:

- Can you find a healthy leaf?
- Describe the leaf. What does it look like, how does it feel, why do you think it is healthy?
- Can you find the opposite of that leaf?
- Describe the leaf. What does it look like, how does it feel, why do you think it is sick?

Activity:

Here are some simple tips for assessing the health of your leaf.

- Are they chewed? That might indicate a critter, such as a rabbit, is enjoying your plants. Or, you might actually find a beetle or slug at work.
- What color are they? If they are brown that might mean they are either burnt (too much sun) or that they are thirsty (check the roots around the plant to see if it is damp). If they are pale green, they might not be getting enough nutrition from the soil.
- What shape is the leaf? If it is curling under, signs of stress, this can also indicate thirst or that it is not getting enough nutrition.

If you know the cause of the problem, such as lack of water, help your gardener solve the problem for the plant. If you cannot determine the exact issue, contact the onsite garden coordinator or take a sample of the leaf and soil to a local gardening shop and ask for help. Together we can observe and help our garden!

Beyond the Garden | Sorting All Sorts!

Tiny gardeners make all sorts of connections about their world by sorting. It's fun to watch how they organize groups of things because they might have a totally different way of organizing their toys, colors, shapes, etc. than adults.

- Grab a collection of things such as shoes and work together to sort. Maybe one pile will have all shoes that tie and another shoes that slip on. Then arrange by color. What do you learn about your gardener's thinking?

Continue Exploring | Supporting Materials

Forest Foundation Family Resources: <https://www.forestfoundation.org/family-activities-in-nature>